

# Summary of Recommendations Being Considered for Inclusion in the Draft Yukon-Innoko Moose Management Plan

The following draft recommendations have been developed by the Yukon-Innoko Moose Management Working Group (Working Group). The Yukon-Innoko Moose Management Plan is intended to apply to Unit 21E and the portion of Unit 21A within the Innoko River drainage. Most of the recommendations in this summary are focused on Unit 21E. At present there are no recommendations to change moose hunting regulations in Unit 21A.

**Mission:** *Maintain healthy and abundant moose populations by proactively managing moose, predation and habitat and keeping moose harvest within sustained yield so that subsistence needs for moose are met on an annual basis and there is sufficient moose to provide for personal and family use of Alaska residents and some nonresident hunting opportunity for generations to come.*

The moose population in Unit 21E, particularly in the southern portion of the unit along the Yukon River, is relatively healthy and abundant compared to many areas in Interior Alaska. The moose population density in the Innoko River area in northern Unit 21E and Unit 21A is lower but there is also less hunting pressure. Local residents and others are concerned that a possible increase in predation on moose and a major increase in numbers of hunters in the area could lead to a decline in the moose population. In January 2003 the GASH Advisory Committee (AC) voted to not reauthorize the state winter season in order to conserve cows and protect the moose population.

The primary mission or purpose of the plan, as stated above, is to establish a proactive management program that will help to maintain an abundant moose population to provide for high levels of human consumptive uses and to not allow a decline to a very low population level that would be difficult to increase. Major changes to the moose hunting regulations and implementation of aerial wolf predation control are not proposed at this time. An important aspect of the plan will be defining thresholds for changes in the moose population or numbers of hunters that will trigger changes in the moose hunting regulations or predation management, should they be needed in the future.

## **I. Moose Population and Harvest Management**

Goal: Achieve the Intensive Management\* moose population and harvest objectives for Unit 21E (a population 9,000 – 11,000 moose with a harvest of 550 – 1,100 moose).

\*Intensive Management (IM) means active management to maintain high levels of game for human harvest using a variety of techniques that could include predation control techniques, habitat improvement and manipulation of seasons, bag limits, and methods and means.

The March 2005 estimate of the moose population in Unit 21E was 7,000 – 9,000, suggesting the population may be near the lower end of the IM population objective. The estimated allowable harvest of moose in Unit 21E based on the 2005 population estimate and using a conservative 5% harvest rate is 350 – 450 moose. The estimate of the current average harvest in Unit 21E is 357 moose, near the lower end of the range of the allowable harvest.

Harvest Rate Objective: Until the moose population is documented to be within the mid to upper range of the IM population objective, manage harvest conservatively with a 5% harvest rate for bulls (this harvest rate includes any cow harvest that may be allowed, as indicated below). If the IM population

objective has been achieved and data indicate good productivity in the moose population higher harvest rates and either sex hunts can be considered.

Strategy 1: Establish a framework for state and federal moose hunting regulations designed to maximize hunting opportunity when possible but which will also ensure that harvest remains within sustained yield and that priority for subsistence uses of moose is provided when restrictions in harvest are needed.

Estimated Subsistence Need Objective: Provide the opportunity for harvest of approximately 327 moose for subsistence use by residents of communities in Unit 21E and other Alaskans.

The Alaska Board of Game (BOG) has determined that there is customary and traditional subsistence use of moose in Unit 21, and 600 – 800 moose is the amount reasonably necessary to provide for subsistence within the entire unit. The Division of Subsistence has estimated that the average harvest of moose for subsistence in Unit 21E is 327 moose. This estimate of subsistence need for moose in Unit 21E can be used to help judge when restrictions in non-subsistence harvest may be needed in order to provide the required priority for subsistence uses by Alaska residents.

## **Moose Hunting Regulation Recommendations**

### **A. Resident moose hunting regulations**

The Working Group considered many options for changes to the fall hunting regulations and the possibility of re-establishing a winter season under state regulations. Reaffirming the previous action of the GASH AC, the group agreed that a large cow harvest would be detrimental to the moose population and a state winter season for antlerless moose should not be proposed. The group recommended keeping the federal winter season for any moose opening of February 1-10. The federal season applies only on federal lands and is only open to federally qualified subsistence users who are residents of Unit 21E and Russian Mission. With limited eligibility for this hunt there is only a small harvest of cow moose in the winter. This allows some opportunity for winter harvest of moose by local residents but does not have a significant affect on the moose population.

Recommendation 1: Provide for a small harvest of antlerless moose in the winter (20-40 cows annually) by keeping the state winter season closed and the federal season (Feb. 1-10) open.

Recommendation 2: If the total cow harvest (including cows taken in the federal season and those taken for potlatches and other estimated cow harvest) exceeds 50, use public information and education programs to encourage reducing cow harvest. If cow harvest remains greater than 50, consider the need to close the federal winter season.

A December season for antlered-bulls only to provide additional subsistence opportunity for Alaska residents was proposed to the Working Group. Some members of the Working Group expressed concern about the potential for a large incidental cow harvest and the possibility of large numbers of hunters flying in for this hunt at a time when bulls are very vulnerable, however the group agreed to present this alternative in the draft plan to see if there is public support.

Alternative for consideration: Establish a state resident season for antlered bulls during Dec. 1-10.

### **B. Nonresident hunting regulations**

The following two options for revising non-resident moose hunting regulations in Unit 21E are being considered. The final plan may recommend no change or adopting one or both of these options.

1. Take 5 days off of the beginning of the nonresident season in Unit 21E to make it 15 days long, from September 10-25.
2. Establish a drawing permit system for nonresident moose hunting in Unit 21E.

As previously noted, Alaska resident subsistence opportunity has already been reduced through closure of the state winter season. There currently is not a large number of nonresident hunters or a large number of moose harvested by nonresidents in Unit 21E. Of the estimated 357 moose harvested annually in Unit 21E, the average nonresident harvest between 2000 and 2004 was 30 moose. The concept of the two alternative approaches for changing nonresident moose hunting regulations is to begin more closely managing nonresident hunting while not greatly changing nonresident hunting opportunity or number of nonresident hunters at the current moose population level. Reducing the nonresident season by 5 days would provide opportunity for subsistence harvest by Alaska residents early in the season with less competition from nonresident hunters. Also, taking 5 days from the beginning of the season rather than the end would have less of an impact on the ability of nonresidents to take a moose. If a nonresident drawing permit system were to be established, the number of permits issued would not necessarily have to result in an immediate reduction in the number of nonresident hunters. Having the system in place would provide the ability to more closely monitor and control harvest and to reduce numbers of permits and the level of nonresident hunting in the future if needed. If guides and nonresident hunters preferred, the permit drawing could be held in winter to allow successful applicants more time to prepare for the hunt.

### **Moose Harvest Management if Conditions Change in the Future**

If the moose population declines or if there are significant increases in numbers of hunters in the area it may be necessary to implement more restrictive harvest regulations. On the other hand, if the moose population is shown to be increasing and is well within the IM objectives it may be possible to increase hunting opportunity.

Strategy 2: Implement a more restrictive harvest management program if needed to maintain the moose population, stay within the harvest rate of 5% and/or provide for reasonable subsistence opportunity for residents of Unit 21E and other Alaskans.

### **Recommended sequence for phasing-in harvest reductions, if needed:**

1. Close the state winter season to reduce cow harvest (already done through the GASH AC).
2. Shorten the nonresident season and/or establish a nonresident drawing permit system to more closely monitor nonresident harvest and prevent a large increase in nonresident hunters.
3. Reduce or eliminate nonresident drawing permits (Consider need to develop an IM plan to reduce predation and/or improve habitat at this level).
4. Establish a resident registration permit system that emphasizes customary and traditional subsistence use patterns or use other options for reducing resident harvest.
5. Shift the federal winter season to a December antlered-bulls only season to reduce cow harvest.
6. Eliminate the federal winter season.
7. Establish a Tier II hunt to allocate among subsistence users in state regulations.
8. Close federal lands in Unit 21E to all but federally qualified subsistence users.
9. Allocate among federally qualified subsistence users according to federal law.
10. Implement a moratorium on all moose harvest.

Strategy 3: If the moose population increases and is within the IM population objectives and composition counts and other data indicate high productivity, consider expanding winter hunting opportunities, including providing for increased cow harvest.

## **II. Moose Predation Management**

Goal: Manage the effects of predation on moose to maintain an abundant moose population that can provide for high levels of human consumptive uses consistent with the IM population and harvest objectives.

Strategy: Emphasize managing the level of predation on moose by harvesting enough wolves, black bears and grizzly bears under state and federal hunting and trapping regulations to regulate the level of predation on moose. If a significant decline in the moose population occurs (such that nonresident hunting seasons may have to be closed), evaluate the need for an Intensive Management Implementation Plan to achieve the IM population and harvest objectives through more active management of predators and/or habitat, including the possibility of aerial wolf control.

Recommendations for managing predation on moose:

1. Submit a proposal to the BOG to legalize use of a snow machine for taking wolves in Unit 21E.
2. Submit a proposal to the BOG to waive the \$25 resident tag fee for grizzly bears in Unit 21E.
3. Submit a proposal to Federal Subsistence Board to change the present requirement of salvaging both meat and the hide of black bears to a requirement to salvage either the meat or the hide.
4. Develop public information and education programs to inform local residents and other hunters about the effects of bear and wolf predation on moose and to encourage increased harvest of species that prey on moose.

## **III. Habitat Management**

Goal: Ensure that optimal moose habitat is maintained so that habitat does not become a factor limiting the moose population size and also ensure that the moose population does not become so large that habitat is overused and adversely impacted.

Strategy: Indirectly monitor habitat condition by monitoring moose twinning rates; work with landowners to review, adopt and implement fire management guidelines that provide for a natural fire regime, and; if concerns about the quality of moose habitat develop, conduct browse surveys and other research to more fully evaluate habitat conditions and potential actions to improve habitat.

## **IV. Cooperative Moose Management**

Goal: Develop cooperative programs between state, federal, Native and other wildlife and land management programs to improve moose management and increase involvement of local residents and others in the management programs.

## **V. Information Needed for Sound Management**

Goal: Identify the information needed to support sound management of moose in Unit 21E and cooperate with other agencies, organizations and local residents to obtain and utilize the necessary information, including scientific data, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and knowledge of all users.